

# LEGISLATIVE REPORT

*from* **Senator Rosa Franklin**

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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The 2005 session is now history.

Our resolve in January was to solve problems, create good public policy, pass a meaningful budget and get out of Olympia on time. Under some very trying circumstances, we did just that!

When the session began, the Legislature faced a \$1.6 billion budget deficit, which included an \$81 million reduction in federal funding for public mental health services.

In crafting a budget, general tax increases, such as hikes in the sales or property tax, were not under serious consideration, and mostly likely would have been fought bitterly by the governor as well as legislators.

With those revenue options off the table, "We had work to do," as Gov. Christine Gregoire frequently said. The budget had to be balanced. Education, health care, public safety and human services had to be funded. Small cities and counties needed help because of the loss of funding from I-695, and it goes on and on. Cuts alone would have hurt some of our most fragile citizens — the disabled, children and people with mental illness.

In the final analysis, the Legislature was able to work together, and much got done that will benefit communities and the state.

Again I was able to sponsor several students as pages, giving them a great opportunity to learn about state government. I also had a wonderful intern from the University of Washington, Turquoise. Annette, my efficient senior legislative assistant, and Gloria, my session aide, kept me, with my full-to-the-brim schedule, on track and everything else running smoothly.

I thank you for the opportunity to serve the wonderful 29th District and the State of Washington. I hope this newsletter gives you a sense of what happened this past session.

Please call, e-mail or write if you have further questions, comments or concerns.

Warm regards,

*Rosa Franklin*  
Rosa Franklin

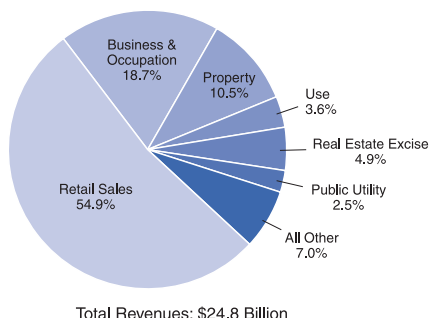


## Balancing the budget: Facing a \$1.6 billion shortfall without new general taxes

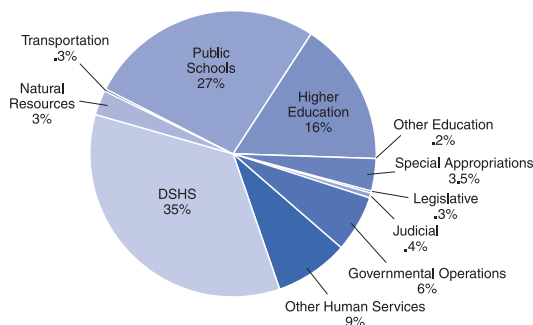
No task is more important during a legislative session than passing a budget. It reflects the state's true priorities, as well as its vision for the future. The budget we balanced this session clearly identifies our top priorities as education, health care and jobs

- Education:** We honored the two initiatives (I-728 and I-732) passed by the voters in 2000 by providing full funding. As a result, students will be taught in smaller classes, and our teachers and school employees will get a much needed cost of living adjustment. Fair compensation is important if we want to keep good teachers. It's an investment that should pay big dividends for our children in improved learning environments and grades.
- Health Care:** An additional 38,000 children from low-income families will have access to health care services as a result of additional funding for the Medicaid program. This boost in funding will go a long way toward reversing the cuts made

2005-07 General Fund — State Revenues by Source  
(Washington State Revenue Forecast, March 2005)



2005-07 Omnibus Operating Budget



several years ago that caused thousands of children to lose coverage.

- Jobs:** New investments in transportation are expected to generate more than 35,000 jobs over the next 10 years. Projects include replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct, building new HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lanes on Interstate 5 from Tukwila to the Pierce County line, and much more.

**How did the Legislature balance the budget?** Facing a \$1.6 billion revenue shortfall is a daunting challenge, particularly when the state has faced significant budget deficits for five years running. We were able to write the budget without raising general taxes such as the sales or property tax. About a third of the revenue gap was covered with taxes on cigarettes, liquor and estates valued at over \$1.5 million. These measures will raise about \$484 million, with the rest of the \$1.6 billion gap made up through cuts, efficiencies and use of a portion of the rainy day reserve fund.

## Health care: Making it more affordable

### Lowering the Cost of Prescription Drugs.

Faced with the ever increasing cost of prescription drugs, it's critical that the Legislature make every effort to reduce costs where possible. Two bills that could help thousands of Washington residents were signed into law: one will allow individuals, private businesses, local governments and labor groups to participate in the state's drug purchasing consortium, which will enable them to get medicines at the same discount as the state (**SB 5471**); the other (**SB 5470**), which I prime sponsored, will help them obtain less expensive imported medications at their local pharmacy if the federal government approves the state's request for a waiver.



- Enhancing Access to Mental Health Services.** Each year, nearly 10 million children in this country suffer from a diagnosable mental illness, as do more than 45 million adults. But fewer than one in five children and only a third of adults with a mental illness receive professional treatment. Why? Because all too often insurance companies make it more expensive for families to get treatment for mental health illnesses than other health problems. The Mental Health Parity Bill (HB 1154) begins to offer a cost effective remedy. It requires insurers to provide the same annual dollar limits, co-pays, deductibles, coinsurance, out-of-pocket maximums, and visit limits for mental health services as for other health services. As passed, insurers are exempt from the bill when selling to small businesses with 50 or fewer employees. In addition, the budget

provided \$81 million for mental health services to the uninsured to make up for the loss of federal funds. The Legislature also revamped the delivery of these services, as well as those for substance abuse, in a way that we hope will reduce crime, homelessness and lessen the burden on the child welfare system.

- Encouraging Exercise.** Lack of physical activity has been shown to be a contributing factor to diabetes, high blood pressure and heart problems. Senate Bill 5186, which I prime sponsored, attempts to increase awareness of the value of exercise. It encourages schools, cities and counties to take into account how they can promote physical activity and make our communities better and easier places to be active.

## Environmental issues: Green cars and green buildings

- Reducing car emissions.** In a major effort to reduce air pollution — more than 50 percent of which is linked to automobiles — the Legislature adopted stricter emission standards. Beginning with the 2009 model year, new cars and trucks sold in Washington will have to meet tighter tailpipe emission standards.

- Green buildings (SB 5509).** This measure, which applies to all public buildings that receive state funding, promotes the use of Washington-grown timber products and the use of building techniques that reduce energy use and save taxpayers' money.





## Education: Improving quality

It's in the public interest to provide access to quality education for all of our children. This session, using revenues from a 60-cent increase in the cigarette tax and partial restoration of the estate tax, the Legislature made some significant improvements in public schools, community colleges and universities:

- **Lowered class sizes in our public schools.** In keeping with the spirit of the voter approved initiative (I-728), an additional \$138 million in funding was provided to reduce class size.
- **Ensured recruitment and retention of good teachers.** Full funding of the voter-approved cost-of-living adjustments (I-732) at a cost of \$139 million recognizes the value of teachers and the importance of keeping good ones.
- **Expanded enrollments at college.** A \$150 million boost in funding for the state's community colleges and universities will give an additional 7,900 students the opportunity to get a college education.

## Economic development: Creating jobs

- **Boosting transportation funding will stimulate economic development.** With passage of a gas tax increase phased in over four years, revenues will be generated to reduce congestion and improve safety on more than 300 highways, bridges and rural roads projects around the state. It's projected that the new transportation projects, which will include the Alaskan Way Viaduct and the retrofitting of many older bridges to make them earthquake proof, will generate about 35,000 jobs over the next 10 years.
- **Life Sciences Discovery Fund will generate 21st Century medical breakthroughs and the jobs of the future.** About \$350 million from the master tobacco settlement will be used as seed money to attract private investors into cutting-edge medical and farm research. This fund — a priority of Governor Gregoire — will be a boon to economic development in the state.
- **Construction budget boosts higher education, local communities.** With a \$3.3 billion capital budget, we'll be building new facilities at our colleges, universities, and public schools, as well in our local communities. Over the next two years, these projects will put more than 24,400 people to work.



## Election reforms

In the wake of the closest governor's race in the nation's history, where votes that should have been counted weren't, and votes that shouldn't have been counted were, it was clear steps had to be taken to ensure the integrity of the voting process. To that end, the Legislature passed an omnibus election reform bill (**Senate Bill 5499**) and other bills that:

- **Require voter identification.** All poll-site voters will have to show a photo ID, voter registration card, utility bill or government document to establish their identity.
- **Verify absentee ballot signatures.** The secretary of state will develop statewide signature verification standards for absentee ballots.
- **Create a voter database.** Beginning in January 2006, county auditors will have access to a centralized list of eligible voters. The database will be regularly updated with the names of deceased persons and convicted felons so ineligible votes will not be counted.



## Other issues:

- **Unemployment Insurance (UI).** Taking advantage of \$100 million in federal Reed Act funds, the Legislature restored unemployment benefits that seasonal workers lost with the 2003 reform of the unemployment system. This year's change will help relieve the stress on these unemployed seasonal workers without raising employers' contributions. In fact, it will reduce contributions from some hard hit industries, such as agriculture and fishing, and provide the business and labor communities with a two-year window to find a more lasting solution to the UI issue.
- **Methamphetamines.** These illegal substances have become a scourge in many of our cities, neighborhoods and rural communities, particularly in Pierce County which has been at the forefront of the war against meth. This session another step was taken to make it more difficult to obtain the ingredients ("precursor drugs") needed to manufacture these illegal substances. House Bill 2266 requires stores to put all over-the-counter medicines that can be used to produce methamphetamines in a secure location. In addition, customers who wish to purchase these cold medicines will be required to have a photo ID and will be restricted to purchasing no more than two packages a day.

## Local projects:

With funding from the transportation and construction budgets, the following local projects got a boost:

- **HOV lanes on Interstate 5** from 38th Street to the Port of Tacoma Road, as well as reconstruction of the interchange at State Route 167, will get \$424 million in funding over the next ten years.
- **Bates College Learning Resource Center** will get \$15 million in additional funding from the capital budget.
- **The LeMay Car Museum** will receive a \$1 million boost from the state.
- **Chinese Reconciliation Park** will receive a \$554,000 contribution from the state.
- **Moorage facilities for the Tall Ships** will get a \$300,000 enhancement.
- **Cleanup of Wapato Lake** got a \$50,000 boost.



**My bills:** During every session, legislators get to work on some “good little bills,” which often are brought to a legislator’s attention by a constituent or are issues particularly important to one community or another. Here are a few such bills I sponsored this session that became law:

- **Nursing Resource Center.** As the state continues to be faced with a shortage of nurses that threatens to undermine the quality of care patients receive, I was thrilled to prime sponsor Senate Bill 5599. The new law creates the Nursing Resource Center, which, thanks to nurses agreeing to pay an additional \$5 surcharge on their licenses, will bring additional resources to the effort to build a strong nursing workforce in Washington.
- **No more gravesite confusion.** Visiting the grave of your teenage son is pain enough for any mother. Learning after the burial service that your child shares the plot with another person can be downright disturbing. That is what happened to Loretta McNeal, the Tacoma mother of 19-year-old Terrell, who was buried on top of another deceased teenager. The McNeal family did-

n’t know that the cemetery plot they’d purchased was a “single use of a multiple internment space,” meaning caskets would be layered on top of each other. I am hopeful that Senate Bill 5182, which requires that cemeteries clearly disclose what contract wording means, will spare other families similar confusion.

- **World War II Oral History Project.** With the passage of Senate Bill 5563, the important contributions women made during World War II will be captured so future generations of public school children in Washington will understand the vital roles played by the generations of women before them.
- **Performance standards for fire protection districts.** House Bill 1756 requires local governments to set standards for the performance and accountability of career fire departments.
- **Affordable housing and other issues still need work.** No session is without its disappointments. However, I promise to keep working next year on a number of bills that failed to pass this year, including ones that make more affordable housing available (SB 5183), better protect children from

environmental contaminants (SB 5188), ban the use of genetic testing when people buy life insurance (SB 5452) and expand grand parents visitation rights (SB 5996).

## Thanks to our 2005 legislative pages for all of their hard work!



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